DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 018 SO 014 509

AUTHOR Flack, Dora; And Others
TITLE The Family Historian: A Creative Writer. World Conference on Records: Preserving Our Heritage (Salt Lake City, Utah, August 12-15, 1980). Series 111.
INSTITUTION Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 36p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Genealogical Dept., 150 E. North Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84150 ($1.00).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Childhood Needs; *Creative Writing; Individual Needs; Literary Devices; Motivation Techniques; Personal Narratives; Photographs
IDENTIFIERS *Family History

ABSTRACT

Five papers on the topic of family history are presented. In the first paper, the author discusses techniques which have been successfully used for motivating reluctant writers to write their own personal histories. For example, in an effort to get her husband to write his life story, one woman asked her children to write what they remembered and felt about their father. When the father read what they had written, he started writing. Illustrating the important role that family albums can play in family history, the author of the second paper shows how to examine family albums and points out the type of information that can be found in them. In the third paper, the author shows, through excerpts from personal histories, how family incidents and personal experiences make history come alive. The need for children to have a sense of their own history is the topic of the fourth paper. In the concluding paper, the author emphasizes that, when writing a family history, it is very important to know about conditions that existed at the time your ancestors lived in order to understand why they lived as they did and what prompted their decisions. A checklist of questions to ask about ancestors when researching family history is provided. (RM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED227018

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dora Flack

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

WORLD
CONFERENCE
ON RECORDS

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

August 12-15, 1980

The Family Historian: A Creative Writer

Panel
Dora D. Flack (Mod.),
May Davis Hill,
George D. Durrant,
David L. Weitzman,
Janice Dixon

Series 111

SP 014 509

$1.00

The statements or
opinions expressed by
speakers at the conference
either verbally or
in written form
are those of the speakers
and do not
necessarily represent
the official position
of the sponsors of
the conference.

Copyright © 1980
All Rights Reserved

Published in the
United States of America
Corporation of the President of
The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

BLANK PAGE
DO NOT FILM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: A CREATIVE WRITER
MOTIVATING RELUCTANT WRITERS by Dora Flack.....1

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS by May Davis Hill.....4

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: A CREATIVE WRITER--
FAMILY INCIDENTS MAKE HISTORY LIVE by George D. Durrant.....18

THE CHILD HISTORIAN by David Weitzman.....22

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: A CREATIVE WRITER
CAPTURING GRANDMA'S WORLD by Janice Dixon.....27

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: A CREATIVE WRITER MOTIVATING RELUCTANT WRITERS

Dora Flack

Born in Idaho. Resides in Bountiful, Utah. Writer, entertainer, teacher, author.

As a family historian you are a creative writer, whether or not you think you are. As Janice Dixon explained, you must recreate a different way of life in a different time frame. You want to make people on your family tree live. But the most important creative writing you will ever record is that which no one else can do for you, and that is writing your own personal history. Writing personal history will help you to find yourself and you will learn in the process that you are a worthwhile individual.

Personal history becomes part of family history. Some day we will all be ancestors far removed and lost to the memory of our descendants, unless we have written our own life stories to make our individual links stronger in the family chain. However, there are too many reluctant writers.

People frequently say to me, "I'm not a writer like you. Mine wouldn't be interesting and I could never make it so."

That is why Janice and I collaborated on the book, Preserving Your Past. It not only tells how to search out necessary facts, but is a writing manual to teach people how to actually organize and write the information in an interesting manner, so that they will become good creative writers. Remember that anything you record is better than nothing. As you pursue your history goals, your skill as a writer will be increased.

As an individual seeks to preserve his or her heritage, and searches for old records, photos, stories, and facts, nothing surpasses the thrill of discovering a journal or personal history of an ancestor, and the pictures to go with it. Imagine your posterity discovering your masterpiece.

George Durrant tells in his book Fun and Names of finding his mother's personal history and his feelings as he read it. When he finished he said:

> Tears of joy moistened my eyes as I saw my mother as a child in Alpine, Utah. Then I saw her as a youth. I felt that I was there when she fell in love with my father. Then the children came. Of all the reading I have ever done, nothing was as gripping as my mother's history as she had written it.

Yet I'm sure his mother didn't consider herself a creative writer. And if he had acquired a similar history written by his father, he would have said the same.

Men are usually the most reluctant writers, and too often they leave out the very humanness posterity yearns for. Their successes loom largest in their minds, and the ordinary occurrences and their feelings are too often left out.

When I was conducting a class one evening on writing personal history one of the students asked, "How can I get my husband to write his life story?" I gulped and replied, "I don't know because I can't get my husband to write his."

Another class member said, "I can tell

you how. My husband refused to do his, so for Christmas I put together a very special book. I asked each of our children to write what they remembered and what they felt about their father. I also asked a couple of his childhood friends to do the same. When he read the book, which wasn't very big, he started writing."

I was so excited about this suggestion that I felt it should be passed on to others. Let me tell you of my recent experience with this idea:

This past Mother's Day as our children gathered, I decided we would do such a book for my husband for Father's Day. This was tight scheduling—only a month in which to complete it. Individually I spoke to our children that day and asked them to write down their memories of their experiences with Dad and tell what he meant to them. I expanded the memory circle to include his siblings. His parents are deceased, so I couldn't consult them. A favorite aunt, to whom he's been close, and her grown children were included. I wrote to two of the companions who served a mission with him for the Church many years ago—also three of his close school chums. Courageously I set the deadline only three weeks hence, allowing time for me to put it altogether.

The response was marvelous. My husband's name was engraved in gold on a lovely three-ring binder. Our youngest daughter did a pencil sketch as a frontispiece. To my delight the childhood friends took pictures out of their own albums and sent them as part of their contributions.

As our clan gathered on Father's Day, this was Dad's only gift. Any material gift would have been anti-climactic. As he spotted pictures and scanned random lines, with everyone still at the table, he began relating stories of school days, stories we had never heard.

One of our daughters-in-law remarked, "Dad, keep the tape recorder handy as you read this, stop and tell the recorder, just as you've told us, all the memories that come to mind, and just think of the history we can all have."

Mission accomplished? Yes, one reluctant writer has been motivated. Reading our children's letters produced a bonus, because we discovered we <u>have</u> done a few things right through the years. All expressed gratitutde for what they have learned from their father and how he set an example for rearing their own children. For the first time, he realized that his own life story would be treasured by his children and would strengthen his link in the eternal chain.

Spouses aren't the only reluctant writers. Sometimes young people are also reluctant. We have six children, three married. In January a year ago we invited them all home for an adult dinner--no grandchildren this time. Wanting to impress upon them the need for writing a personal history, I managed to steer the conversation in that direction. Our daughter who was twenty said, "But, Mom, it's foolish to write mine now. I'll probably live another 60 years so I should wait until I'm older. I <u>am</u> keeping my journal faithfully." I was proud of her for that.

But with that kind of an attitude, by the time they got around to writing their life stories, my husband and I might be gone and no one could answer questions about their early lives. Suddenly I knew what our Christmas gifts for them would be.

I started collecting and jotting down memories of each child. I emptied the drawers where I had stuffed their mementos over the years: photos, report cards, certificates, play and recital programs, school booklets they had made. These I sorted into six piles, one for each child, and put each pile in a large manila envelope. By using scraps of time, memories were jotted down on scrap paper and filed in the appropriate envelopes. My husband's assignment was

pictures and having prints made from old slides and negatives.

Each child's story was completely different. When they received their gifts on Christmas, they were amazed. Our third son said, "Now we all need a copy of one another's stories and we'll have quite a family history. As the oldest boy glanced quickly through his, he said, "Mom, you surely didn't know the straight story of this camping trip." That was exactly the reaction we wanted. Immediately he wanted to correct inaccuracies and give more detail.

Then I explained that these books were not written so they could abdicate their responsibility of writing their own histories, but as a springboard from which they could dive into the depths of their own experiences. And the early events, not known to them, are now recorded for reference. Their appreciation is boundless.

I too benefited from the writing experience. A life recorded is a life twice lived. In writing those stories I found myself chuckling and crying at the typewriter as I re-lived our family's life. But it was more enjoyable this time, minus the trauma. I knew we would survive the crises and could be more objective on the replay. And our children have a record of our love for them, in writing. We cared enough to write.

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS

May Davis Hill

Born in North Carolina. Resides in Birmingham, Michigan. Curator of photography, Michigan Historical Collections, University of Michigan. M.A., University of North Carolina. Author.

Last March, treasure hunters exploring in a bog in County Tipperary, Ireland, found an eighth century gold and silver chalice and communion set. The discovery was considered to reflect a golden period in Ireland's past, and thousands flocked to see it at the museum in Dublin. An editorial in the Irish Times commented that "It is not just the esthetic value of the object which draws the eyes of the country. The hoard is seen as a key to our past. Who are we? What does this tell us about ourselves?"

A collection of family photographs in an album has the same effect on later generations when they discover it. It helps answer the same gnawing questions. Who are we? Where do we come from? What does this tell us about ourselves that we never realized before? In an album, someone has gone to the trouble of assembling and organizing these clues to history even as an eighth century craftsman organized the elements of his communion set, and this has given to the assemblage a coherence that has great value. The craftsmanship is not necessarily of the same degree; but the creative, organizing intent is important in both cases.

The albums of the last century were like the compartmentalized slide boxes of today. Although they could not hold quite so many images, they provided the means of organizing personal photographs. An important difference was the expense of the container. Family albums were often handsomely bound in leather or plush. Their capacity was far more limited, and people had to choose carefully the images they wished to include. This made intelligent selection desirable. Today's slide boxes by comparison seem to multiply limitlessly, allowing for mindless accumulation and endless repetition.

Around the turn of the century cheaper albums became available, with blank pages which allowed one to paste in more snapshots. This development had its drawbacks, however. All the poor, dim, and fuzzy photographs could now be squeezed in somewhere, making for greater quantity but far less quality. Such albums despite their uneven quality, can be the carriers of some traces of family tradition, but much of the material is often unidentified and therefore less valuable. For this and other reasons these carelessly-made albums are probably more meaningful to their compilers than they are to posterity.

The subject of most older albums is, of course, a family or an individual. Eventually albums came to be used to commemorate shorter periods of activity such as one's college years, a trip to Europe, or the infancy of a new baby. Inevitably, twentieth century public relations experts appropriated the medium for use as commemorative vehicles of what are often unimportant events and to flatter important people. An example is the album about a cabinet member's trip to China, with a copy for every official on the junket.

Today we shall examine some of the earlier family albums, concentrating on the type of information that can be found in them. We can do this because an album, after all, is a statement created by a human being reflecting his own and

his family's surroundings and their points of view.

An important difference between an album and a slide box is the relationship of the photographs within them. Slide boxes are like any other container not arranged according to a set pattern of relationships. They present items one at a time, with little relevance to one another. The creator of an album has imposed an order in which more interesting relationships can be shown. Such relationships can be detected from the sequence within the album, from the juxtaposition of photographs on the same and facing pages, from their relative sizes, and from their placement within the album as well. For this reason an album should never be broken up. Even if the pictures are all the same size, the relationship between them disappear when the pages are taken apart. These photographic elements are like words in a sentence. When they are scrambled, their meanings get lost. The compiler, like the author of a book, had a reason, whether conscious or unconscious, for arranging the elements as they are. To destroy this meaning is to lose the opportunity for discovery.

The makeup of nineteenth century albums is also unlike modern albums. Besides a handsome embossed or tooled leather cover often with a gold-colored metal clasp and decorative corner protectors, there were organizing elements. A gilt-lettered title page often faced handsomely decorated end papers. At the front following the title page or at the end of the volume there was usually an index page with numbered spaces for the indentification of each photograph. The index page was seldom filled out, but because the pictures could all too easily be shifted about, this was perhaps just as well. Identifications, when they were made, often appeared at the bottoms of the pages under the openings through which the photographs appeared. They were frequently made by a later hand. Creators of the albums already knew who everyone was and seldom worried about later generations. This lack of identification in itself indicates for whom the album was intended. With few exceptions it was intended for the pleasure and instruction of contemporaries of the album makers rather than for posterity. Fortunately, the backs of the photographs themselves often have contemporaneous identification.

Another specially designed album has a theme which divides the book into eight sections. Called a "fern album," it has eight illuminations which intersperse the portraits. Each illumination shows an elaborate nosegay composed of six to seven ferns, one of which is usually in flower. The index describes each illumination, giving its Latin name and its numerous common names. Following Rosa alba (White rose) in the frontpiece, for example, is Galanthus nivalis with its common names "Snow-drop, Candlemas Bells, Bulbous Violet, Fair-Maids-of-February, and Purification flower." More than forty ferns and flowers received this extensive treatment. One wonders if the placement of a portrait under a particular heading might have had some significance as to the feelings of the compiler about the subject. Sea-Spleenwort, for example, might cause some speculations about the relationship of the compiler to the persons whose portraits he placed beneath it.

At any rate, such an elaborate album must have served as a handsome gift for some special occasion such as a graduation or a marriage. We must remember, too, that for most families there was a great deal of spare time in the evenings, in pre-radio and pre-television America. The descriptions of the flowers would have afforded welcome amusement and instruction on uneventful Sunday afternoons and around the parlor lamp on long winter evenings. The family album and the stereopticon were considered sufficiently innocuous for Sunday entertainment. They were excellent conversation pieces, too.

Let us examine an album which has a very personal orientation. (See fig. 1 A at end of paper.) It is about four inches

by six inches in size, bound in gold-embossed red leather and has an unusual gold-colored metal clasp ornamented with a mesh bow. Ivory bosses at each corner protect it from wear. The thick edges of the pages are gilt and embossed with a floral design. On the front the name Ethel appears, embossed in gold. Obviously this album was a gift to a young woman. Since it is well labelled, we can tell from the names penned under each photograph that she was Ethel Fountain of Kansas, born in 1864. Later she became Mrs. Hussey of Mt. Hamilton, California.

Inside, the album has a well-designed title page printed in gold by a lithographic firm in Philadelphia. There are spaces for thirty small photographs (about 2 1/2 inches by 4 inches) with openings cut with rounded tops and corners, elegantly outlined in yellow ink approximating the gold of the edges. All the openings are the same size, but the photographs vary in apparent size because some of the early tintypes have fancy paper frames with small oval openings. Other paper prints have been cut down at the upper corners to conform to the size and rounded formats of the page openings. Larger albums might accomodate photographs of several sizes and thus present more complicated sets of realtionships. Here, however, we can concentrate on a simpler format and more obvious relationships.

The contents begin with a spread of two early photographs which a later hand has labelled Eliza and Henry Smith, aunt and uncle (presumably of Ethel Fountain Fig. 2). The verso of the woman's photograph is, however, inscribed in an older hand, "Grandmother Fountain," and it was made in Princeton, Illinois. When the same photograph appears with identification by the same later hand two pages later, the verso reads "Mrs. William Fountain, Grandma Fountain, Orlando Fountain's Mother, 1382 (?)." Likewise, the opposite photograph is inscribed "Grandfather Fountain, 1881 (?)...William Fountain...father of Orlando." The problem of these discrepancies is solved in the second double-page spread. It shows a tintype made in Saratoga, N.Y., of a young woman called Jennie Fountain opposite a much later photograph postcard stock showing Orlando Fountain. These two here are identified as Ethel Fountain's parents. Thus we are reassured to find that the album begins with the grandparents of Ethel, rather than an aunt and an uncle, and that her parents appear next after their elders.

The owner of the hand that misidentified these early photographs evidently was not entirely familiar with the older subjects and did not look on the backs to learn their true identities. The pages of the album are fragile today, and were probably very delicate by that time. This may have discouraged investigation. We had to use tweezers to remove the photographs for examination.

Two pages farther on (Fig. 3) another spread carries early photographs of the parents, with the father identified as "Maj. O. Fountain." Then come baby pictures of Ethel in 1866 and 1869 (Fig. 4) followed by full-length photographs of the parents, again from the 1860s (Fig. 5). The father this time is in full Civil War regalia, seated with his hat jauntily thrown over a near urn-shaped finial. After this comes another spread showing a farm near Sabetha, Kansas (Fig. 6). The left photograph is identified on the back as Orlando Fountain's farm in 1865-1866 and the right as the stone schoolhouse, on the corner of the farm, where Ethel first went to school about 1870. The farmhouse appears in the distance. These two are followed by an 1880 photograph of a 16 year-old Ethel, identified as having been born in Carson, Kansas, on 20 December 1864.

The album has been roughly chronological thus far. The only exceptions are two mislabeled men, who turned out to be uncles of Ethel, of whom only later photographs seem to be available. Their placement is not inappropriate, however, because they appear soon after the grandparents and just before Ethel's parents, who would have been of the same generation.

Now there is a break in chronology with the appearance (Fig. 7) of one "Mrs. Deyoe, grandmother of Ethel Fountain." Her photograph was made in Saratoga, New York, in about 1860. For some reason this grandmother seems not to have been given her appropriate position at the front of the album. Could she have been less--well loved than the Fountain grandparents? She may have lived farther away, and in that time this would have presented great difficulties so far as getting to know one's grandchildren was concerned. We are reminded that Ethel's mother's earliest photograph was also made in Saratoga. This, then, is Ethel's maternal grandmother. Ethel and her uncles were later photographed in the 1880s in Illinois where the Fountain grandparents lived. It is certain that there would have been more trips from Kansas to Henry, Illinois, than to the home of Grandmother Deyoe in Saratoga.

Thus we have a history of family migration to consider. Jeannie Deyoe, Ethel's mother, must have left her home in Saratoga about the time she married Orlando Fountain of Illinois, with whom she removed to a Kansas homestead after the Civil War. Here Ethel, apparently an only child, was born on 20 December 1864. The photograph of Grandma Deyoe was made around the time of the Civil War, while those of the Fountain grandparents were made as late as the 1880s. Also, the maternal grandmother may have died around the time of Ethel's birth.

Whatever the reason for the discrepancy, Ethel's album life goes on, with two tintypes showing her as a girl of about fifteen with her parents and a black and white dog in the yard of the farmhouse in Kansas. Next she appears (Fig. 8) at about eighteen with a schoolmate in Binghamton, New York. Apparently she returned to the East for her education. In the following tintype she appears as Ethel Fountain Hussey of Mount Hamilton, California. Apparently about forty, she stands on a shady terrace wearing an elegant dress. With glasses perched on her nose, she reads a letter, perhaps from Illinois. Her California home appears to be quite comfortable.

This was Ethel's last appearance. There are seven more photographs of two Hussey children, most likely Ethel's, and of their friends. They seem to enjoy their life on the west coast. A snapshot of about 1910 shows the two children as teenagers seated with their Fountain grandparents on the front steps "at their Observatory Residence [in] Ann Arbor, Michigan." A check of the records at the University confirms that Ethel's husband, William J. Hussey, was a professor of astronomy there. The records also tell us that Ethel died in 1915, at the age of fifty.

The two remaining photographs are afterthoughts: an 1870s photograph of two Fountain cousins as children in Henry, Illinois, and a duplicate photograph of Major Orlando Fountain in uniform. As a patriotic finale, this last portrait lies back to back with a colored wood engraving of an American eagle perched before a shield of red, white, and blue stripes. The album is completed by a numbered "Index to Portraits," which has never been filled out. As we have observed, album makers seldom bothered with this chore.

We are less concerned here with detective work than with the arrangement of the album and its meaning. Grandparents stand at the beginning, as they might in a family tree. Then follow uncles, aunts, parents, and children. In addition to their placement at the beginning, the number of times parents and grandparents are repeated is also an indication of their importance. One would have little use for a second or third photograph of a person one didn't like or who had little significance. Following the parents and children is the childhood home, often an important shrine. Later homes do not have so great significance as the first one. Somewhere down the line comes the less significant or shorter-lived grandmother who lived too far away to be well acquainted. Then a glimpse of growing up, the favorite

pets and school days, before a brief reference to marriage. No husband appears here. Children occupy more space, four out of thirty photographs, only one space less than is given to father Orlando. Mother Jeannie makes four appearances while the more favored grandparents make two each. Thus both placement and number of appearances give us clues to relationships and feelings.

Use of the eagle at the end reflects the patriotism that persisted from the first days of the republic and was in this album associated with the father's Civil War service. The emphasis on ancestral and parental portraits goes along with the patriotic theme with which the album closes. This phenomenon was not unusual in family albums in the nineteenth century. Portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln frequently appear along with family portraits. Washington's tomb was a favorite subject. In one instance Lincoln is taken up to heaven in the arms of Washington, an obvious reference to the assassination. In all this we can see patriotism going hand in hand with the pride in the family, parents, and ancestors. There are many other themes which are unrelated to the family as well. Thom Thumb and his bride appear in signed photographs. Venus and Cupid find their place. The British royal family are also frequent subjects, showing the continued existence of Anglophilia along with American patriotism. Both themes accord with reverence of ancestors. In the child's family as in his fairy tales, father and mother are equated with king and queen.

Another less elaborate album contains photographs from scattered regions. It includes an interesting portrait (Fig. 9) of an elderly black man inscribed "George Harris, of Uncle Tom's Cabbin [sic] fame." Formally dressed and wearing mutton-chop whiskers, he sits beside a spinning wheel, holding the thread on its way to the spindle. The photograph was published by the New York Gallery of Detroit.

Other photographs in this particular album are scantily identified, but the correlation of the places where the photographs were made show some trends. The number of pictures of young adults and their location indicates that the person who compiled the album attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. But the fact that the photographs of several older adults were made in other Michigan places—Detroit, Owosso, and Jackson—suggests that the student's home was somewhere else in the state. Finally, the presence of numerous photographs made of children in Nebraska indicates a westward migration and settlement in Nebraska around the turn of the century. We have no identifications which can confirm any of these assumptions, but the last photograph in the album is a faded one of a large farm family. Six children share the stage with six adults of varying ages. The photograph is too faded to reproduce well, so I cannot show it, but its evidence is clear.

Other elements often appearing in albums besides family members are photographs of friends of family members. An example (Fig. 10) is a portrait labelled "Sarah Skellenger, State's Friend." The inclusion of this genial bespectacled elderly woman shows the value placed on friendship by the anonymous creator of the album. Many of the children, too, appear to be those of friends and neighbors rather than members of the family.

Conclusion

A final word should be added in connection with the family album. The longer the album and the more photographs it includes, the more involved one can become. Studying the faces of people over many years of their lives and in varying circumstances, one inevitably comes to feel strongly attached to the persons who appear in the album. The faces become those of friends. Certain albums, especially those created by one person, affect one more than others. A check with some of my colleagues reveals that they also are affected in this way and by the same albums. This is surely a credit to the creative impulse of the compiler.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

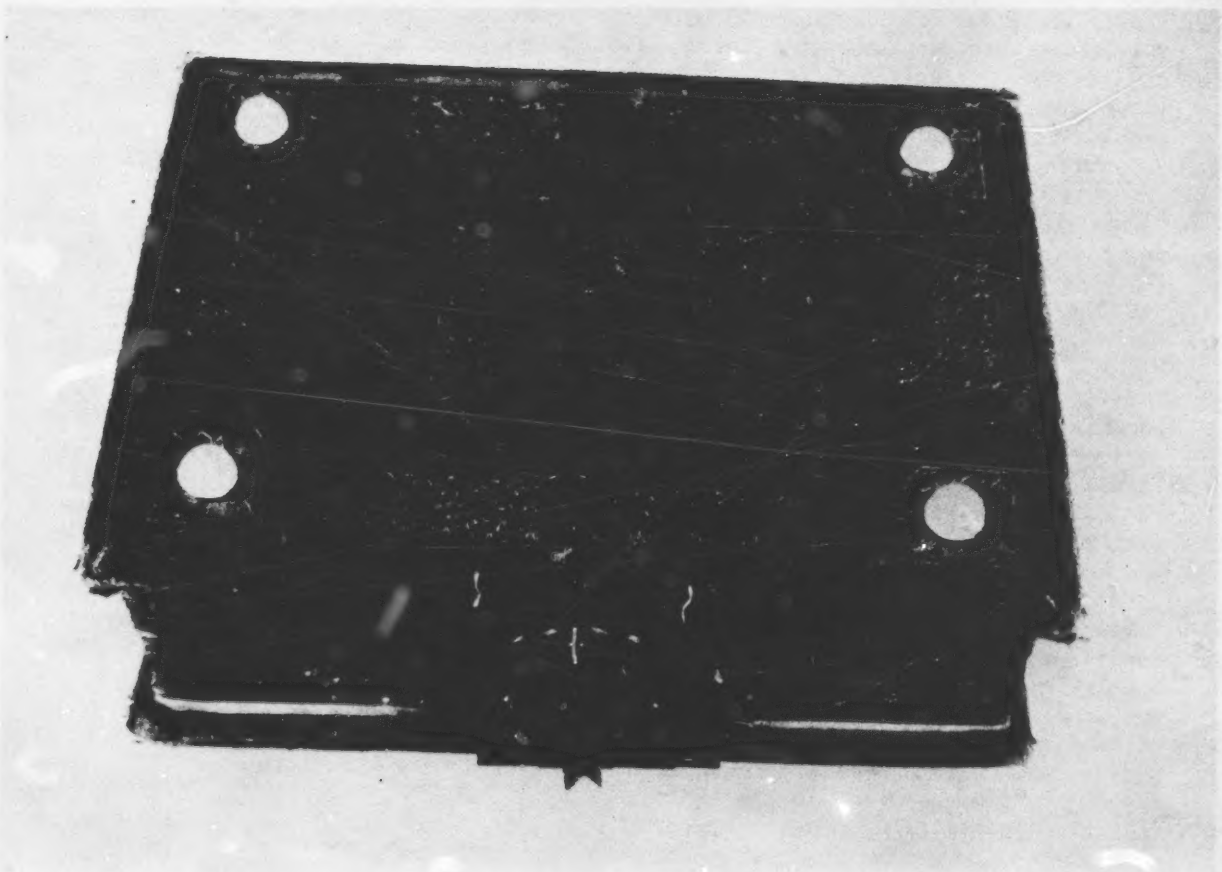

Fig. 1. Gold-embossed red leather photograph album (four-by-siz inches in size)

111b/Hill

Fig. 2.
Left: Henry Smith, uncle of Ethel Fountain
Right: Eliza Smith, aunt of Ethel Fountain, "Grandma Fountain"

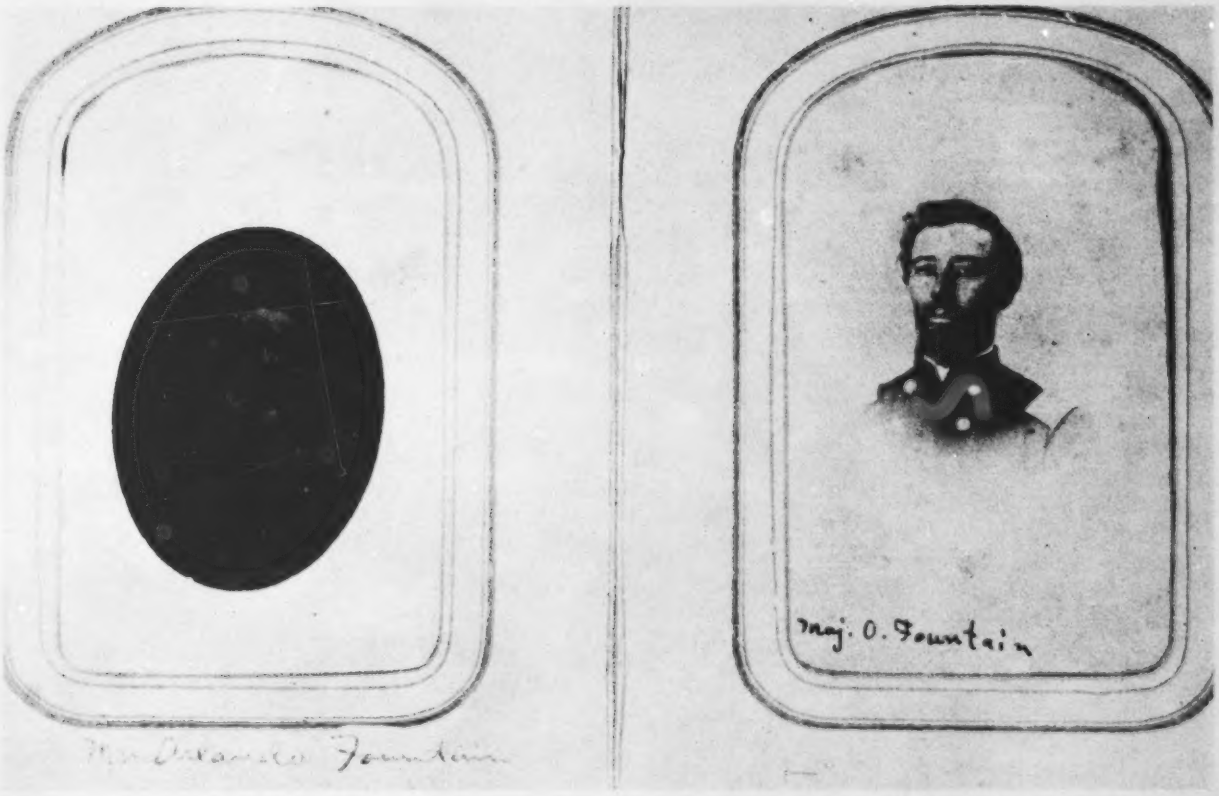

Fig. 3. Ethel Fountain's parents, "Maj. O. Fountain and Mrs. O. Fountain"

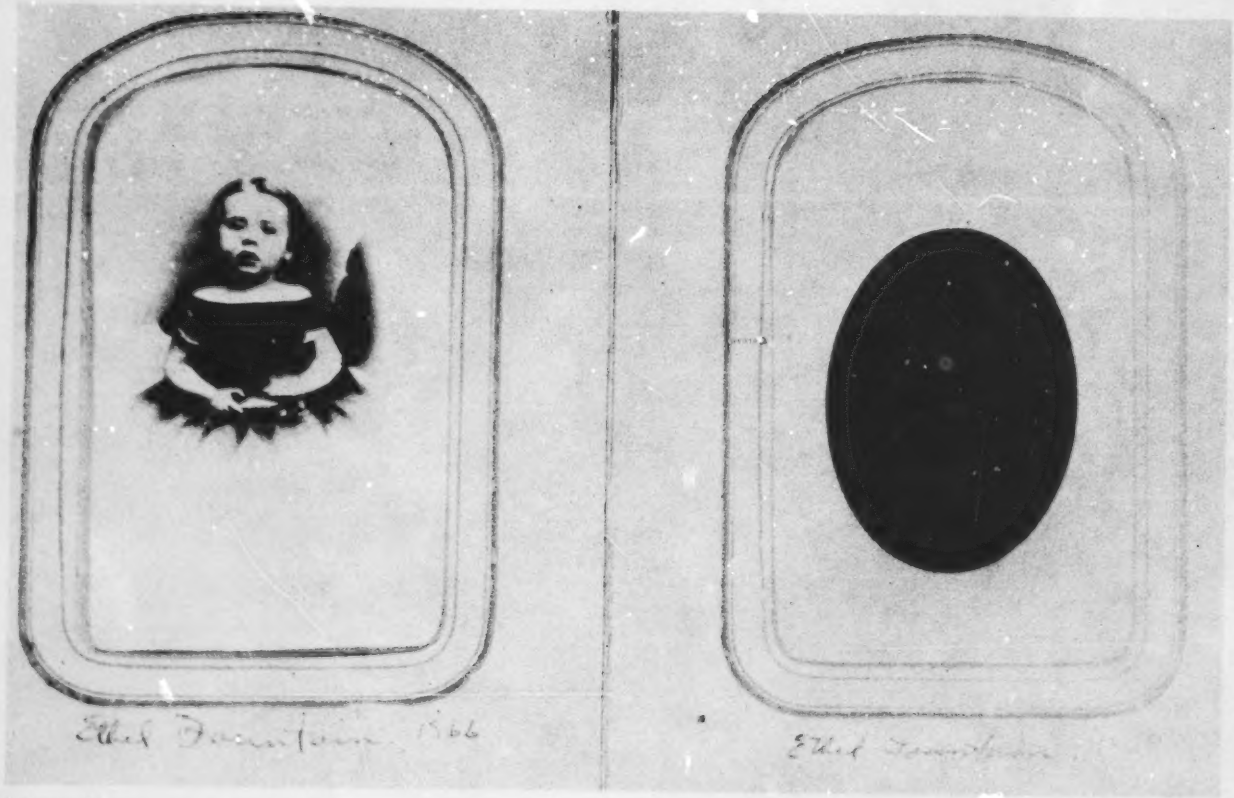

Fig. 4.
Left: Ethel Fountain 1866
Right: Ethel Fountain 1869

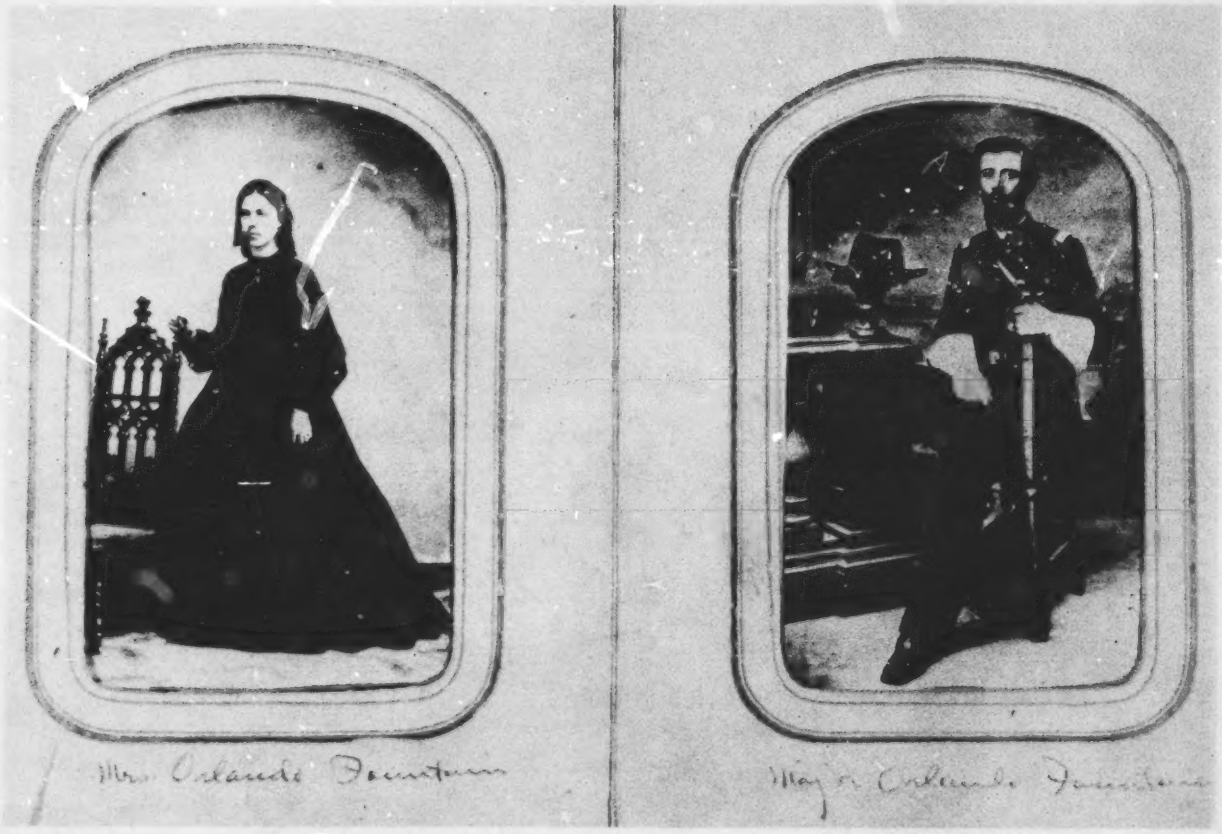

Fig. 5.
Left: Mrs. Orlando Fountain
Right: Major Orlando Fountain in full Civil War regalia

111b/H11

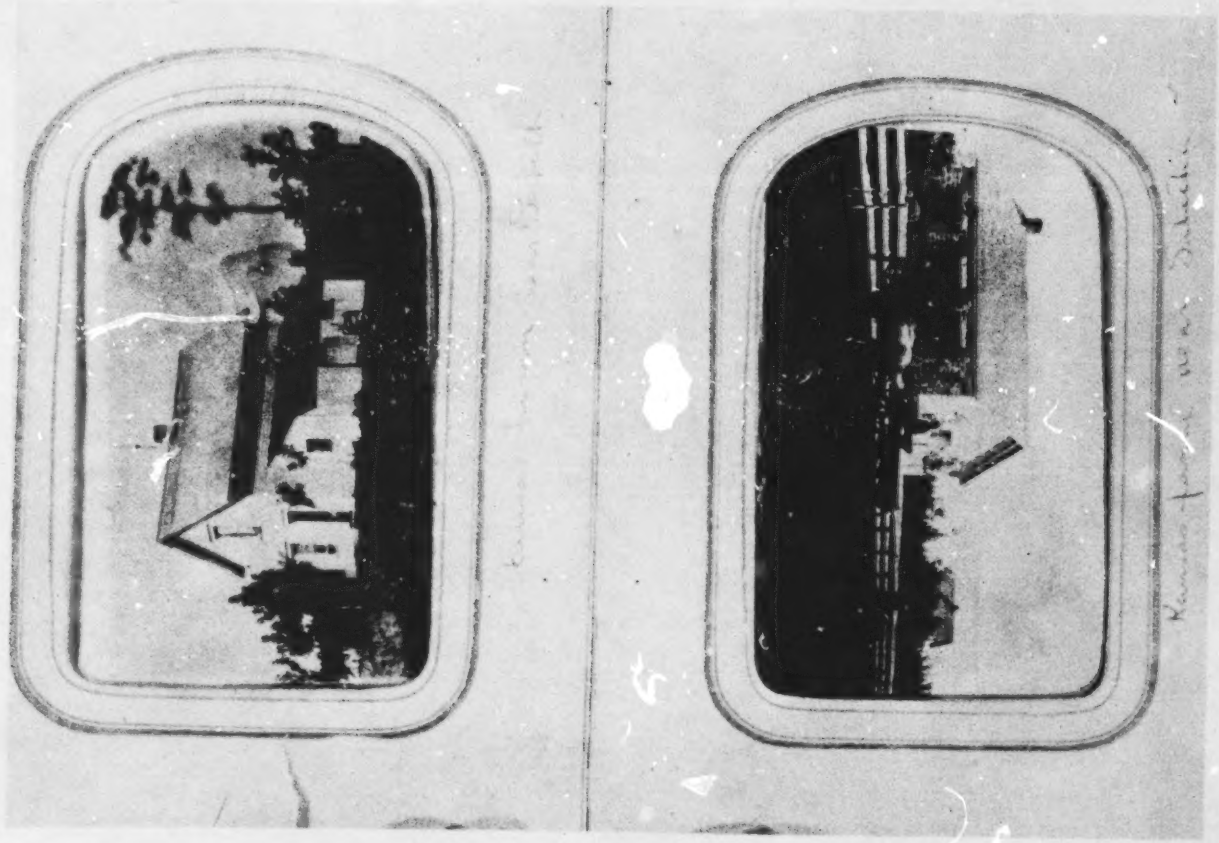

Fig. 6.
Left: Orlando Fountain's farm near Sabetha, Kansas
Right: Stone schoolhouse near Sabetha, Kansas

Fig. 7.
Left: Ethel Fountain
Right: Mrs. Deyoe, grandmother of Ethel Fountain

Fig. 8.
Left: Ethel Fountain with schoolmate Julia Shaw in Bingahamton, New York
Right: Ethel Fountain Hussey, Mt. Hamilton, California

Fig. [illegible] "George Harris, of Uncle Tom's Cabbin [sic] fame"

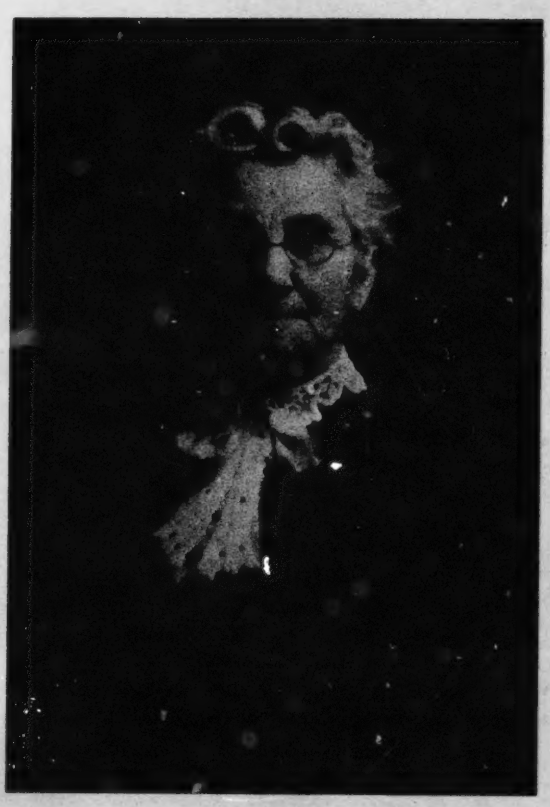

Fig. 10. "Sarah Skellenger, State's Friend"

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: A CREATIVE WRITER— FAMILY INCIDENTS MAKE HISTORY LIVE

George D. Durrant

Born in Utah. Resides in Salt Lake City, Utah. Director, Genealogical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ed.D., Brigham Young University. Author, lecturer, teacher.

A speaker said, "I hope that you will forgive me for telling of a little personal incident that occurred to me."

I said to myself, "I will gladly forgive you. Up until now I've been a little bored."

And sure enough he told a personal story and suddenly my mind forgot the clock, the warm temperature of the room, and even myself as I listened intently to his personal illustration. He then went on to more general principles, but somehow these impersonal comments now seemed to be illuminated by the light of the little personal incident.

Once while in an art class I watched a master portrait painter. His magic brush used greens and reds and browns and suddenly his paint seemed to be flesh. The golden hair was placed and combed with a few quick strokes of his ever moving brush.

It was difficult to hold back an audible "Ah!" as the painting became more and more the person.

As I realized he was nearly finished, I felt that a likeness was there but the life or the spirit was missing. Then suddenly with a tiny brush he added a small bit of near white paint to each dark eye and the painting seemed to become a living soul, for now there was light in the eyes.

A personal story amid the deep flesh tones of facts, dates, and accomplishments that make up a family history can be the light in the eyes that will bring the entire account to life.

Some years ago I had heard of Yellowstone Park and particularly Old Faithful and I longed to go there. The awaited day finally came. Arriving at the site of the big geyser I had time before the next eruption to read a description of why this phenomenon occurred so regularly. As I read, I kept looking at my watch. I didn't want to be reading when the action started. The more I read the more I sensed that I knew what to expect. Perhaps with such knowledge I could depart without waiting for the eruption. After all, I had just read a good description of what would occur.

But I didn't walk away. I waited and then suddenly there was a great noise and up from the earth it came. I was breathless. The white water spout lifted higher and higher. My head tilted further back as my eyes rose to where the water seemed to push against the deep blue sky. The wet mist blew into my face.

Then suddenly the whole glorious process retreated and disappeared.

I had heard about and read about Old Faithful and I thought I knew her. But it wasn't until I heard her tell her own breathtaking personal story that I found a place for her in my heart.

Personal experiences in natural parks of human drama are like the eruption of Old Faithful. They take matters from the head and transfer them into the heart.

Suddenly we are no longer studying but instead we are feeling.

Of course, there is a balance needed between personal experiences and the overall background of the total life's experience. I knew a teacher once who related one personal experience after another. Some of his stories made him out to be quite a wise and heroic character. Soon the young people walking to his class were heard to say in a mocking way, "When I was in the Army . . ." and "When I was your age . . ." They had grown weary of his many tales of his own glory.

Perhaps this illustrates two things. First, it is possible to speak or write too much of a personal nature; and second, experiences chosen should not be designed to make the subject appear to be glorying in himself. Thus, the best-told experiences are those which indicate a struggle, and a victory--something to which others can relate and say, "Something about like that happened to me."

My son wrote a history of my father--his grandfather. It is well spiced with family incidents.

I quote from that history.

> Sports were an integral part of Bert Durrant's life. His need to work from an early age precluded his participation, but he was ever the quintessential fan. His brother Walt was an unusually gifted baseball player and received several offers from major league teams; but Walt's career was spent with the American Fork city team--to leave the city of his birth, family and friends would have been treason.
>
> American Fork was consumed with sports fanaticism. Baseball was king until the mid 1930's when basketball assumed the throne. All American Fork stores closed at 1:00 on Wednesday afternoons, and a good 50 percent of the citizenry would attend the city team's baseball games. Walt was a gazelle in center field, and a gorilla at the plate--a player famed for his ability to hit anything a pitcher threw, even an intentionally thrown "wasteball" he had to chase halfway to first base.
>
> An incident from Walt's career illustrates the all-importance of sports during this period. Walt was stricken with appendicitis, just days before a big game with the much hated Provo nine. The usual postoperative prescription was a month of rest to prevent breakage of the stitches. But Walt would have none of that. He persuaded Doc Richards to wrap him up tightly so he could play. Doc Richards didn't need much persuading; he well understood the importance of beating Provo. Walt the wounded warrior came through in true Jack Armstrong fashion: he hit two singles, a double, a triple and a homerun in five at-bats. American Fork's charge up San Juan hill was a success--they crushed the enemy 9 to 5.
>
> Bert's deepest joy came in the athletic achievements of his sons--particularly the basketball successes of his second youngest boy, Kent. Kent was a Goliath among Tom Thumbs, a 6'7" center who could dribble across the foul lane and shoot a feather-soft hook shot with either hand. He was the first Utah prepster to dunk the ball, and was considered by many to be the greatest Utah high school basketball player to that time.
>
> Sports mania was even capable of turning Kent's mother Marinda from a kind and loving matriarch into a fiery-eyed fanatic. In a game with Lehi during Kent's junior year, she and Bert had the misfortune to sit two rows behind a burly Kent-hater.

> The Lehi fan's arsenal was stocked with invectives; he even made several not-too-subtle references to Kent's ancestry. In the fourth quarter Marinda's patience expired. She grabbed her husband's arm and yelled, "Bert, get down there and fight that man! He's got no business yellin' like that at our boy." A cooler head prevailed as Bert turned to his distraught wife and softly scowled, "I ain't gonna fight nobody, and another thing I ain't gonna do is take you to another basketball game." Sports were war, but Bert saw no sense in running unarmed into an enemy sniper nest.

Again quoting from that same history:

> Bert's hunter's instinct was legendary. His grandson Olani Durrant describes the almost mystical experience of hunting with Bert: "Grandpa would walk over the quaky leaves without making a sound, and he expected you to do the same. When he stopped you knew you'd better stop, too. I'd hold one foot in the air sometimes for as long as ten minutes. He'd whisper, Ya smell that deer? Of course, I couldn't smell anything. And then he'd say, I can tell by the sound of its walking that it's a buck. I could never hear anything. Grandpa always got his deer, it didn't matter how poor the hunting was."

And finally this is from the same history:

> Another anecdote, one of Bert's favorites, better typifies Bert and Marinda's relationship. Bert didn't go anywhere in his old, green International truck without his faithful hunting dog, Jake. Jake preferred sitting up straight in the passenger seat human style to putting his head and paws out the window like most dogs. Marinda often jokingly expressed fear that the townspeople might mistake the big dog for her as Bert drove the streets of American Fork. But one day her jokes turned to impatience as she and Bert prepared to make a shopping excursion into town. "Bert," she said sternly, "I'm not riding into town sitting next to that smelly dog." Bert nodded his understanding, started up the International, and drove off without his startled wife. Marinda walked into town that day, and from then on quietly sat next to ol' Jake on shopping excursions.

From hearing these three stories, I'm sure that you can now see more clearly Bert Durrant. He wasn't perfect but he was wonderfully human.

Reaching further back into history and to accounts of the lives of some who were not my relatives, I relate this personal story about Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. This gave me a deeper insight into his nature and a greater love for him, and for his friend, Heber C. Kimball.

> Heber, on one occasion, was invited to address [a group] on the subject of faith. Every passage of scripture bearing on the theme having been quoted by previous speakers, and not wishing to repeat what they had said, he was left to depend entirely upon the Spirit. He began by relating the following anecdote, the incident of which had occurred in his own family:
>
> "My wife, one day, when going out on a visit, gave my daughter Helen Mar charge not to touch the dishes, for if she broke any during her absence she would give her a whipping when she returned. While my wife was absent my daughter broke a number of the dishes by letting the table leaf fall, and then she went out under an apple tree and prayed that her mother's heart might be softened, that when she returned

she might not whip her. Her mother was very punctual when she made a promise to her children, to fulfill it, and when she returned she undertook, as a duty, to carry this promise into effect. She retired with her into her room, but found herself powerless to chastise her; her heart was so softened that it was impossible for her to raise her hand against the child. Afterwards, Helen told her mother she had prayed to the Lord that she might not whip her."

Heber paused in his simple narrative. Tears glistened in the eyes of his hearers. The Prophet Joseph was weeping like a child. He told the brethren that that was the kind of faith they needed—the faith of a little child, going in humility to its Parent, and asking for the desire of its heart.

The fact that Heber C. Kimball would choose to relate such a personal story caused me to love him. And the line indicating Joseph Smith's tears brought him into greater focus in my mind. The power of scriptures cannot ever be overstated. But it is my opinion that those at the meeting remembered best the personal experience that they had heard that day.

Family incidents are the means of taking the reader from an interest to a deep interest. Light in the eyes, the mist in the face—these are synonymous with a personal story set in a well-written personal or family history.

THE CHILD HISTORIAN

David Weitzman

Born in Illinois. Resides in Covelo, California. Free-lance historian, educational consultant to Mendocino County Museum in Willits, California. M.A. (history), Northwestern University. Author, teacher.

A few days ago my daughter, a second-year university student, turned down my dinner invitation explaining that she was spending the evening with her "elderly friend." When we did get together Arin told me about Ruchal, how a project had put them in touch; how they took to each other, talked, went for walks, had lunch and dinner out, explored museums and the campus, visited as often as they could, and looked forward to the next time. The visits with Ruchal had become a feature of Arin's life, something, I suspect, she hadn't expected. Her first thought, I'm sure, was to be helpful, passively helpful, softening the pain of someone's loneliness by just being there. But that's not what happened. Whenever she reflects on their days together, which is often, there's now no hint of any obligation or mission, no oughts or proffered reasons. She has simply found a friend.

What they talk about mostly is history. Ruchal's history is "living history," Arin often remarks, proud of the phrase; and each time with the same unguarded surprise that Ruchal's history could be so unlike anything Arin's had in school. Ruchal came to America from Europe a young woman, one of the faceless denizens of steerage who add up to the immigration statistics in textbooks. Arin likes to imagine that she found Ruchal in one of Lewis Hine's photographs, a weary, haunting peasant face which drew her back to the exhibit again and again until it finally closed. Ruchal and Lewis Hine have collaborated, unknowingly of course, to recreate for a young woman her own immigrant experience of three generations ago.

Arin worries that she's actually taking more from the friendship than she's giving. Ruchal's memory is filled with a profusion of images and stories from the old country which over the years have blended with, become inseparable from, the collective memories of her parents and grandparents. The sights and sounds of a Galician market, a Yiddish parable told by generations of mothers to new generations of daughters Arin's age, recollections of war, an immigrant woman's first moments in America, all these are Arin's. "She is my historian." But Ruchal is more than just a willing, garrulous informant to an eager schoolgirl; she has become for Arin the embodiment of the past, a kind of historical everywoman. And for Ruchal, Arin is more than just a listener. Arin senses the preciousness of the gift her friend offers her but, in her youth, cannot begin to understand what she is giving Ruchal. Arin has become Ruchal's historian. For Ruchal, in these late years, there is a need to remember, to put her life in order, to recall little stories, to savor childhood ambitions and fantasies—youthful dreams long kept just to herself, perhaps for the first time, perhaps for the last.

That Arin's friend happens to be from her grandmothers' generation interests us; not long ago, no more than two or three generations anyway, we would have thought nothing of it. But we've forgotten.

Somehow Arin and Ruchal have slipped back into a time when granddaughters grew up and grandmothers grew old together in a natural counterpoint to family life. The sixty-year difference in their ages, far from making such a friendship improbable, turns out to be the bond. Naturally, each generation has to discover the bond between elders and the young for themselves; I had to.

That discovery came while I was a teacher and parent in the 1960s and early 1970s. Our children were floundering and as teachers, parents, or simply adults, we may have fared little better. That's history now--too close for some--too bizarre in retrospect for most of us. Still one aspect of that history remains largely overlooked. We looked frantically for the cause of our plight--the violence, the uprooting, the crazy shifts in values. It was not long before we found what we were looking for and, in our troubled state of mind, pounced on the culprit.

It was the past. It was the past and anyone who had anything to do with the past even if only by accident of birth. Older people--our parents, our teachers, our leaders--had failed us, held us to old, traditional ways, and not prepared us for what was to come. We pictured ourselves as the first generations to have to face the future. We knew exactly where the future was; we could pinpoint it at a place we called "the interface." Then, having deftly drawn the line between present and future, we could describe scientifically the buffeting experienced by anyone moving through it. That was "future shock." The phrase appealed to us somehow and it soon became the banner word of those who would sever once and for all our links with the past. McLuhan readily diagnosed our problem as "rear-view mirror syndrome" and chided us for always responding to uncertainty ahead by returning to the immediate past for comfort. Herman Kahn dared us to think the unthinkable, to get used to the inevitability of "far-out possibilities" like interstellar travel, laboratory creation of artificial life, complete genetic control, and communication through extrasensory phenomena. Always, in our constructs and metaphors, the image of the invisible barrier persisted, a barrier presenting an almost impossible challenge to those of us firmly rooted in the past.

The jump through "the interface" was difficult, especially since no one knew just where it was. So we jumped around a lot thinking it might be close. Feeling like Alice scolded by the queen we protested that "one can't believe impossible things." But the modern day descendants of the queen became even more impatient with us. "I dare say," they said in her very words, "you haven't had much practice. Why, sometimes, I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast!" The interface with the future had been found and the line drawn. Our failing to cross it gracefully had been fully diagnosed. Clearly, the problem was one of not being prepared. It was future shock after all.

We made a big thing of not being prepared. Why had we been so overwhelmed? Why hadn't we seen the future coming? And who was at fault for not warning us, preparing us? Whether any generation had ever been prepared for the changes that would come in their lifetime was not one of the questions we asked. Nevermind that our humble, often illiterate ancestors--drovers, wood hewers, water carriers, blacksmiths, miners, shoemakers, farmers--had somehow moved from the towns, shtetl, and mountain villages of the old country to an inconceivable life in America. Never mind that they and their children (our parents and grandparents) learned a new language and adapted to a new life at a time when life was changing at a pace unknown in history. Never mind that for probably the first time ever only one or two generations passed between peasant and professor. We alone, we told ourselves, faced the threshold--the first to take the brunt of history's cruel caprice. Of course we didn't know how uncertain was the view across an ocean in the 1800s. Nor did we understand what it

meant to our ancestors to face an uncertain future, some as children alone, and strike out toward a whole new life. We never asked them.

Teachers and parents were particularly sensitive to the question of preparedness. For some the answer was in new life-styles and new schools, alternative schools. Others placed the blame squarely on public schools. With the best of intentions and some defensiveness, teachers dismantled curricula and came up with some of the most exciting innovations in decades. Future courses appeared as electives. High school students read visionaries like Buckminster Fuller and learned of other ways to look at the world. Actually, the best of these efforts followed upon some very accurate assessments of what children would need in the future, the ability to adapt to inevitable change without becoming disoriented, to develop increasing tolerance for ambiguity, and to live in a diverse, contradictory world without losing their identity. But as accurate as these assumptions might have been—they were simply another way of describing the qualities of our ancestors—the courses didn't work. The reason was hard to see in those days, because the symptoms of future shock are identical to those of another disorienting condition caused by the sudden, drastic break with our past, <u>past shock</u>. In breaking with the past, disturbing the natural continuity of experience, alienating ourselves from our elders, we took on an awesome responsibility. We had to face the future alone. For some, especially the young, the responsibility was overwhelming.

But not all our children succumbed. A few survived, even thrived in the ambiguity and uncertainty. I remember watching these students, intrigued by whatever it was that kept them going. They hadn't withdrawn. Nor were they coping by becoming hardened and insensitive to what was going on around them; they were, in many instances, the most involved. And they weren't the puritans of a new age. They too experimented, dabbling in the fads, but they weren't consumed. I watched them move hesitantly but purposefully along a way that eluded their classmates (and many of their parents) as though they had solved the maze. And I wondered. Had they some gift of prescience others lacked, some vision that allowed them to step almost lightly, daringly into a future that was destroying others? It appeared that quite the opposite was true.

What all of these children shared was a sense of history, their own history. The confidence with which they walked uncertain paths came not from any clearer view of the future, but from a stronger sense of where they had been. Rather than being drawn into the future they were actually being coaxed reassuringly, lovingly, from behind--by their ancestors. Each, it turned out, had a strong sense of family. It wasn't that they actually knew a lot of dates and places and facts from their past. Few could actually name their ancestors. Their "history" was, instead, a very personal, kind, transcending genealogy. Somewhere along the way, from stories retold at family reunions, perhaps old newspaper clippings discovered in a closet, in a world of old photographs, and reminiscences with grandparents, they had met their ancestors. A rusty spokeshave found in the garage had become a symbol of grandfather's work. An old piece of silver or pottery had been cause for an impromptu geography lesson on the Old World. Old dress-up clothing, or a story that began "When I was your age . . ." helped them find the past. Few students could recall any deliberate instruction in their past, only that somewhere in their few years they had met their great- and great-great- and great-great-great-grandparents and liked them.

The history that sustained these children, you'll notice, was not the history taught at school but the history shared at home. That distinction is crucial. Schools have always taught

history with a capital "H," formal history, such as the History of the American People, World History, or the History of Mankind. All of this is quite distinct from history with a small "h," personal history--the history of the family. I doubt if any historian would argue one to be more important than the other; there's a place for each. And that's the point. Schools and universities continue to teach formal history. The focus shifts with the times from, say, classical Greece and Rome to, more recently, American political history. But the complement, family history, has largely disappeared over the last two or three generations. Like cooking, sex education, crafts, home skills, and now, parenting, family history has been given over to formal education, with the family essentially abdicating its responsibilities in what, to me at least, are clearly parents' responsibilities. As with these other subjects, when informal history disappeared from the family circle, no one seemed to notice. Then, when certain of the outcomes of teaching such history (or giving advice on sex or parenting)—cultural continuity and adaptive living skills--are missed, parents blame the schools and the institutional surrogates for failing to provide what can really only happen in a family. Worse, children feel that everybody's let them down.

The difference between these two histories, and especially the paucity of personal history in our lives, has a lot to do with our perceptions of the future. Our outrage at being so "unprepared" for the future comes, in large part, from one of the subtle side effects of history, formal history. History is recorded and interpreted backwards, looking back across the years in the opposite direction from the way events developed. It can't be any other way, of course, because we're here and history is there, but the effect is always the same as reading the ending of a mystery story first. We always know who did it before we know what led up to it happening. The historian, then, has an unreal advantage of knowing the outcome of some movement, conflict, cultural development, or metamorphosis beforehand. But if history were written another way, with the historian placing himself there, at the time, looking toward the future, that history would not only be quite different but of more value to the young reader. Instead of the clockwork certainty that characterizes modern histories, there would be pages and pages of confusion, wrong guesses, baffling events with no immediately offered explanations, discouragement, and unanswered questions. Questions would be asked that would be given wrong answers in early chapters (because, unlike what does happen in history books, the right questions are not usually asked at the right time) and different answers later. Cleverly packaged, and compulsively resolved, history simply does not convey to children the uncertainty, the fears, the insecurities, the agonies, and chaos that all generations have experienced (which we now call future shock). Formal, carefully arranged history, in fact, creates just the opposite impression of a succession of predictable historical progressions always neatly resolving all of their antecedents.

It's easy to see from this how children could conclude that they are the only confused generation, that not only did historical people anticipate each new turn of events but they were even ready with a name for them! A cartoon appeared some years ago that makes the point. Clothed in a doublet and pleated collar, a man with a Van Dyke beard, clearly representative of the late Middle Ages, stands before a window. He has just thrown open the shutters and looks out over the church spires and slate roofs of what might be Amsterdam or Brussels. Exhilarated over something in the morning air, he shouts to his wife in excitement that it's the first day of the Renaissance! Now my students did not find this cartoon funny, and that's telling. The child's sense of history is just that; people over the centuries have anticipated each new age and recognized it when it came upon them. For children, events in history proceed over some

logical course from one "age of man" to another, each appearing right on time, conveniently right at the beginning or midpoint of the century. In this lineal, anticipatory kind of history, people knew exactly where they were going all the time, could see changes as they were happening and even (if influential enough) hurried them along.

What is needed to counter this concept of history is found in family history. Ruchal's kind of history is so intriguing to my daughter because Ruchal expresses along the way her surprise, dismay, her shock, her feelings about what was coming. What's more she makes a story of all the false starts and wrong decisions along the way that everyone (except people in our history books) make when faced with new situations. Children don't read in formal history about human reactions to personal confrontations with change, or what I call "What the Heck Happened?" (WTHH) moments in history. At each moment in history someone, either alone or with lots of other people, are there watching, experiencing different feelings, thinking—though not usually, when it happens. Each one of these instances is a personal lesson in dealing with change. And it is these moments that are most likely to be recalled and told with considerable excitement in informal, family history.

My students experienced a WTHH moment in history one day in our class as part of an oral history project. Their assignment was to bring a parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, or anyone who could speak from personal experience about something we were studying in history. Today a tenth-grade girl's grandfather would talk about his experiences in World War II, and it would be an extraordinary experience for us. He was a tail gunner on a B-25, these were the last weeks of the war in Europe, and he was only nineteen. As he described to the class how he had learned to lead a fast moving plane with his machine gun fire, his hands gripped the imaginary gun, and his eyes searched somewhere out beyond the class, in the cold skies somewhere over Germany. There was a fighter out there. In a voice alive with the incredulity of the moment long ago he gasped at the closing rate of the Luftwaffe fighter. He was there again in the cramped little bubble as if a quarter of a century had never passed between us, watching this strange aircraft come through his sights at an amazing speed. In seconds, before he could react—every student was there with him—he saw the fighter speed by, saw that it had no propeller, and heard its unearthly whine. He recalled how stunned he felt and how later, at their mission debriefing, the intelligence officer listened to his story without giving the young man the satisfaction of a surprised reaction. In a few years some historian would pinpoint the day in the war when the first Luftwaffe jets took to the skies. But someone was there. It was this grandfather, still crouched before us, reliving the day when he entered the "jet age"—alone.

The chain of family history, indeed, the chain of sharing has been broken. Some of our children, like Arin, will be stirred by a need and seek out elderly friends like Ruchal. Others will have to be taught the old skills again by their teachers and parents. The children will become their elders' historians. The simple, day-to-day sharing of family history, like an antique chair or faded old photograph, will be dusted off, celebrated, and reinstilled in family life. Then our children will have the past they need remembered, not as some historical era, but "My father told me that when he and mom were growing up...."

THE FAMILY HISTORIAN: A CREATIVE WRITER CAPTURING GRANDMA'S WORLD

Janice Dixon

Born in Utah. Resides in Salt Lake City, Utah. Instructor in family history, Brigham Young University extension. Ph.D., University of Utah. Author, editor, teacher.

A story has been handed down through our family, a story about my great-grandmother Lewis. It seems that she was cooking a big pot of soup one day and an Indian chief came and looked into the pot. He decided he wanted a taste so he took his hunting knife and stuck it into the pot to spear a morsel of meat. My great-grandmother became angry and said, "No, no, no," and shook her finger at him. The chief raised his knife and was going to kill her. She screamed and nearby men grabbed the chief and took away his knife.

This is the beginning of a family history. It is a story handed down by a parent or a grandparent. Some of these family incidents are written down. Others are passed on to the next generation by word of mouth. Sometimes the stories are embellished in the telling, others have important parts missing. Unfortunately, this is where most of the stories stop.

While I was writing the section on writing family histories in our book, Preserving Your Past,[1] I asked Everett Cooley, a librarian in charge of family histories at the University of Utah, what was the element in the family histories that was usually missing. After thinking about it for several days he gave his answer. "Most family histories are sterile," he told me. "They don't give any background." As I studied I could see that he was right. Most histories present families living in a nebulous world, not eating or sleeping, or making decisions. The families don't worry about war, money, food on the table, wayward children, unfaithful spouses, floods, crop failures, leaky roofs, social obligations, failing grades, polio, dysentery, a lame horse, or the nature of God.

Like my story about my grandmother Lewis, they are presented without background of any kind. If you are going to write a family history you need to know about conditions that existed at the time your ancestors lived in order to understand why they lived as they did and what prompted their decisions.[2]

Let's take this simple story and develop it.

First of all, if there is anyone who knows anything about this ancestor or this story, go to him or her first. In my case I went to my mother who was the one who told me the story. She told me that her grandma was asked to help teach the Indians how to cook and sew. Mother added, "At that time there was an Indian Farm."

"Where was that?" I asked her.

"Near Spanish Fork." I remember once as a little girl, riding west toward Leland and grandma pointed to a hill by the old sugar mill and said, "This is where the Indian Farm was."

An Indian Farm! This gives credence to the story and makes it much more interesting.

I checked other sources--the family writings--diaries and accounts already written. I needed statistics.

111/Dixon

My great-grandmother was named Agnes Reid Ferguson Lewis, and for convenience in giving my talk, let me call her Agnes. She was born in 1843 and died in 1920. This establishes a time element in which we can work. At the time that they came to Spanish Fork the family consisted of her father, her stepmother, Elizabeth, her twin sister Barbara; Elizabeth, 12; Eli, 10; William, 7; and Andrew, 3. Agnes and Barbara were 15 years old.

I found two sources that told about the Indian Farm reservation. One was The History of Spanish Fork[3] and the other was a pamphlet telling about the historical monuments located in or near Spanish Fork, Utah.[4]

While you are writing your family history make use of source books such as these. Go to your historical societies and ask for information about the city or town of your ancestor. Go to your library and ask for help. If your librarian is a good one, she will work with you to find the information you need. She has been trained to help and can save you hours if not days of work by finding the right book. Look in general books first, such as the history of a city or state, then go to encyclopedias, yearbooks, or magazines of the day. Keep these reference books close by as you write your stories.

If your family moved from one country to another, you would want to compare and research both countries. It will give you a much better background into their lives and decisions.

The more you know about the time and place, the more accurate you become. Without this awareness of the past you become like the Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, an intruder into the past. Unless you do some background searching you place your ancestor in a vacuum. She will exist without the politics, economics or geography of her own time.

In the two books I found about Spanish Fork, I discovered that the Indian Farm Reservation was set apart by Brigham Young in 1854, but it didn't get off to a good start unitl 1856. It was twenty square miles and extended from the state highway and the Spanish Fork river to Utah Lake.[5] Governor Young promised the Indians that the pioneer settlers would teach them the art of farming. Men were called from surrounding settlements and about one hundred men responded to the assignment. They tilled the land, built a dam on the river, and dug an irrigation canal to channel the water.[6] They raised twenty-five hundred bushels of wheat in 1859, only three years into the project. In the early 1860s more troubles began with the Indians. The Utes were unhappy about the number of settlers taking over their lands, killing their deer and catching their fish. They started making demands on the settlers, asking for sheep or cattle. The more warlike Indians raided the settlements and in 1865 a family was massacred. It was at this time that a new treaty was signed with the Indians and the farm was no longer in existence.

This is the background for my great-grandmother's story. During the time of the Indian Farm Reservation there was a period of uneasy peace with the Indians, but generally they were considered as savages, ready to turn on you at any time.

Agnes and her family moved to Spanish Fork in 1858. Agnes was fifteen years old. She was unmarried at this time, a young girl of Scottish descent. She married in 1865, so this incident happened sometime between her fifteenth to twenty-fourth year of age. She was small, about five feet tall, but held herself erect and straight. She had brown hair and light blue eyes. In fact, the Indians called her "Sarapouche" which they told her meant "white eyes." Her photograph shows a short woman with firm-set jaw. From stories about her, I must assume that she was outspoken, determined, and rather stubborn. She had a sense of humor and a strong sense of right and wrong. She was also compassionate. One time she went to the river for water and found an old Indian woman left there by

her tribe to die. At first Agnes gave her a cup so that she could drink from the river. Later on she brought her food to eat. Gradually, through Agnes' help, the old woman recovered and crawled up to the Indian farmhouse.

Here was a young girl cooking soup. The Indian chief, on the other hand, probably considered his knife as clean. He only used it for killing and eating. When Agnes reprimanded him, it was a great blow to his pride. He did not like being reproved by a woman, especially one as young as Agnes. His reputation was at stake.

As we write this story, as we write all of our family histories, we must remember the culture of the people involved.

Try to mingle the history from the books with the stories told by our traditions. Agnes tells about living in a dugout. As we study the history of Spanish Fork, it appears that the people started to settle there in about 1852 and because of the scarcity of wood, they were forced to make shelters in the ground. These dugouts were usually dug four or five feet deep with steps leading down into the room from one end, and a roof of willows and mud. Family records corroborate this description. They tell us that their first home was a dugout and wagon-box which had been previously constructed by Duncan McIsaac, Agnes' stepbrother. The dugouts were quite warm and comfortable during the winter with a fireplace in the end opposite the entrance.

Food at this time was in short supply. In 1855, crickets ate the crops and for several years after that famine faced the entire territory. The next year the settlers ate lambsquarter or pigweed. A few potatoes were raised and some grain. They dug roots and gathered greens and caught fish in the streams. In addition to the grasshopper plague, in 1862 a flood washed out the lowlands in Spanish Fork, ruining the early crops and flooding fall-planted grain. So at the time that this story must have happened, food was scarce, and yet the settlers were neglecting their own farms and the building of their homes to establish a farm for the Indians.

While we are researching background, we cannot forget the compelling force that brought the settlers to this area, forcing them to accept a culture alien to their previous ways of life. Their religious beliefs must be brought into this story or you have left out the whole reason for their being here.

These people believed that God had spoken to their prophet and that they had been led to a land away from persecution by their enemies. This is why they accepted dugout homes and starvation diets. Brigham Young told them that the Indians were their brothers, that it was better to feed them than to kill them. This is why they left their own fields to till, cultivate, water, and develop land for their Indian brothers.

What about the national politics of the time? Even this far away from Washington they were still affected. Buchanan was the President of the United States and in 1857 he sent an army into Utah to invade the settlers. The men of the territory stood ready to defend their lands as the threat of war hung over their heads.

As I continue to research background for this story, I am finding material not only for one story, but for many of the family tales that have been told.

As you are writing your histories, here is a checklist to ask yourself about your ancestors.

1. Politics: Which President most affected the nation during those years? What policies affected your family? Were their racial problems? Which war or wars were being fought? What involvement did family members have in the military service?

2. Economics: What were your family's finances? During this time was the country in a period of inflation or depression?

What was your family's business or vocation? Were there any natural disasters and did they affect your family, such as droughts, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, floods, or disease?

3. Religion: What was the general religious climate? Were there any religious problems or harrassments? What were the specific family beliefs?

4. Homes: What was the location? City or farm? How were the homes heated? How was the cooking done? Was food scarce or plentiful? How did the family travel?

5. Culture: In the art fields of music, theater, dancing, art, and literature, can you find out what type of art was popular or appreciated, how much it affected your family?

6. Schools: Were the schools private or public? Were they large schools or one-room school buildings?

It would be impossible to fill out all the categories listed and you probably wouldn't want to either. Take notes about anything that might have affected their lives. All of this seems like a lot of work. It isn't. I was able to find most of my information in one book in a few hours. My problem is that it was so interesting that I wanted to find out more.

So far I have been talking about researching your family's history. Researching is the great iceberg that often is never seen, but must be there. Now I'd like to talk about the part of the iceberg that does show—the written part of the family history.

How do you organize a history? Separate the times in a person's life according to the background changes. For instance, in Agnes's life she lived first in Scotland. I need to present her background there and then give any instances that occurred. Then they boarded a ship in 1855 and were eight weeks crossing the ocean. I need to research the type of ships used at that time. They crossed the plains arriving in 1856. Another background for her. They stayed in the Cottonwood area near Salt Lake for two years. More research. When they moved to Spanish Fork in 1858 I need to add information about the specific area.

In order to develop the story about the Indian Farm Reservation I would carefully outline the story giving background material first. In giving the background to this particular story, what would be the important material that should be covered?

a. The date they arrived in Spanish Fork.

b. What was Spanish Fork like at that time?

c. The type of homes and where they lived.

d. The members of the family at that time and the ages.

e. The personality and nature of the person involved.

f. A background of the Indian Farm Reservation: what was its purpose and where was it located?

g. The tribe of Indians involved and its nature.

h. The feelings of settlers and Indians toward each other.

i. Economic conditions.

j. Religious climate.

k. Political climate.

After setting the scene and using this information, you are then ready to tell the story about the Indian and the soup. Now your reader appreciates the story more because he can understand the situation. You are also better able to go on and tell other family stories that occurred in this period of their lives.

As Agnes grows older, her background is going to change. She marries and after a few years in a dugout home, moves into an adobe home. I have stories about Indian raids and how she bars the door of the home with scissors and forks stuck in the door frame to keep out the marauding Indians. She doesn't move from this home until just a few years before her death, but her circumstances have changed. I need to show some of those changes.

As you go back in time trying to recreate a history of your family, you will find that you are less likely to judge your ancestor. Your job is to present facts and stories and not to praise or condemn. Often facts become colored by emotions, and bitterness can exist for generations. "I don't want to write about my grandfather on my mother's side," someone might say, "because he was a terrible person." Have you stood in that person's shoes? Do you really know why he made the decisions he did? On the other hand, when someone says, "my grandmother was a marvelous person," then he is also judging, and frankly I don't always believe him. Give the facts and the stories and let the reader make his own decisions.

As you research and write you will spend a long time in researching, writing, and preparing your manuscript. You have spent time and energy, but what have you gained?

You have gained a greater interest in history. Now it has a special meaning to you. You have become acquainted with some very interesting people—your ancestors. You have a better understanding of your own heritage and why it is significant to you. You are no longer judging these people, but accepting them as they are. You know where they lived and some of the problems they faced. Your record tells about the lives of your people, who they were and what they accomplished.

A family is a very special organization. It is the basic unit of all human life. It is more than biological. It embraces the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual training of every person on earth. Some parents ignore these obligations and the family pieces scatter and become lost. A family history gathers up those pieces and places them where they belong. Guard it well for a family history is not only your past, but your future.

111/Dixon

NOTES

[1]Janice Dixon and Dora Flack, Preserving Your Past (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1977).

[2]Preserving Your Past, 123.

[3]Elisha Warner, The History of Spanish Fork (Spanish Fork, Utah: Press Publishing Co., 1930).

[4]Historical Monuments located in or Near Spanish Fork, Utah (Spanish Fork Press, November, 1963).

[5]Historical Monuments, 5.

[6]History of Spanish Fork, 60.

[7]History of Spanish Fork 37.

[8]Family record: biography of Andrew Ferguson, written by Agnes Lewis Crandall.

[9]Preserving Your Past pp. 124-25.